

Department of the Interior  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Pacific Islands  
300 Ala Moana Blvd., Rm 5-311  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96850  
Phone: 808 792 9530  
Fax: 808 792 9583  
<http://pacificislands.fws.gov>

# News Release



For Release: November 4, 2004  
Contact: Ken Foote 808 792 9535 or 282 9442

PIEA-04-28  
04-114

## Draft Recovery Plan for the Laysan Duck Released for Review

A draft revised recovery plan that identifies recovery actions for the endangered Laysan duck was released today for public review and comment. Written by scientists from the U.S. Geological Survey's Pacific Islands Ecosystem Research Center and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the plan focuses on actions that will reduce the risk of extinction by addressing threats to the population, protect and enhance habitat quality, and establish additional wild populations. This draft recovery plan revises the original 1982 recovery plan and is designed to incorporate the most current scientific information on the species.

The endangered Laysan duck (*Anas laysanesis*) until now had the smallest geographical range of any duck species in the world and consisted of a single population of approximately 500 birds. This was changed in October when a population of 20 young birds was established on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge.

"The recent translocation of birds from Laysan to Midway is a landmark event for recovery of the species," said Gina Shultz, acting field supervisor for the Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office. "As indicated in the plan, the establishment of additional wild populations is essential to the ducks' survival and serves as an insurance policy against extinction."

According to the draft recovery plan, the Laysan duck may be considered for downlisting from endangered to threatened status when the following conditions are met:

- The Laysan Island population is stable or increasing when averaged over a continuous period of at least 15 years.
- A total of at least 920 potentially breeding adults exists in at least 5 stable or increasing populations on a combination of predator-free Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (including Laysan) and predator-controlled sites on main Hawaiian Islands.
- A successful captive or semi-captive breeding program using wild source eggs is established.
- A plan to promote gene flow between wild source populations through inter-island translocations is developed and implemented.
- Island specific management plans for each population that are sufficient to reduce threats and increase populations to recovery levels are developed.

The availability of the draft recovery plan for a 60-day public comment period was announced in the *Federal Register* on November 4. Copies of the draft recovery plan are available through the Fish and Wildlife Service's website at <http://pacific.fws.gov/press/> or by calling the Fish and Wildlife Service's Honolulu office at 808 792 9400. Written comments may be submitted until January 3, 2005, to the Field Supervisor, Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office, 300 Ala Moana Blvd., Room 3-122, Box 50088, Honolulu, HI 96850.

Previously found only on the remote island of Laysan in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, this species is one of only two endemic – “found nowhere else” – ducks still found in Hawaii, the other being the Hawaiian duck or koloa (*Anas wyvilliana*). The Laysan duck was believed to be endemic to Laysan Island (it was found historically on neighboring Lisianski Island, but was extirpated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century), but in 1995 evidence from bones revealed that the duck once inhabited the islands of Hawaii, Molokai, Maui, Oahu, and Kauai.

The first humans known to live on Laysan came in the 1890s to mine phosphate –rich bird droppings or guano. They killed approximately 300,000 seabirds in six months. Humans also introduced rabbits that devastated the vegetation, turning the island into a desert-like terrain and leading to the extinction of three endemic landbirds (the Laysan Rail, Laysan Honeycreeper, and Laysan Millerbird). The Laysan duck was also hunted for sport and for food, but it was the devegetation caused by the rabbits that drove the duck close to extinction. Its total population was recorded at 11 birds in 1911.

The duck was listed as endangered in 1967 because of its small population, limited distribution, and dependence upon a fragile ecosystem. The species faces high risk of extinction due to its small size and restricted geographic range, making it extremely vulnerable to severe weather, disease, accidental introductions of nonnative plants and animals, and habitat degradation.

Laysan ducks are teal sized, between 15 and 17 inches in length, are brown with a bright green-blue to purple speculum (the distinctive feathers on the secondary flight feathers), and have a white area eye ring. Males have a blue-green bill with black spots along the top. The female usually has more white around the head and neck, and has a dull brownish yellow bill. Both sexes have orange legs and feet. The ducks are primarily insect feeders, but may also feed on leaves and seeds.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.